



**Testimony of The Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity and Opportunity
Submitted to the Education Committee
Wednesday, March 1, 2023, ~ 10:00 AM**

Good morning, Representative Currey, Senator McCrory, Senator Berthel, Representative McCarty, and other distinguished members of the Education Committee. This is a joint testimony written by Melvette Hill, and Thomas Nuccio of The Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, am pleased to submit our testimony **in support** of the following bills:

- S.B. No. 1093 (RAISED) AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE JUVENILE JUSTICE POLICY AND OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE CONCERNING EDUCATION.
- H.B. No. 6759 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING EARLY CHILDHOOD.
- H.B. No. 6760 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING CIVICS EDUCATION AND MEDIA LITERACY

The Commission supports S.B. 1093 in its entirety.

The recommendations before you today include language which have been developed with due diligence and extensive research.

Districts continue to have high numbers of suspensions and expulsions. Having districts with high levels of suspensions and expulsions develop, implement, and submit a plan for improvement to the State Department of Education is a necessary recommendation that will provide more context and data that can help illustrate the magnitude of suspensions and expulsions in our state.

In Section 2, we support the added roles of not less than four staff persons for the purpose of providing support, on-site monitoring and oversight of schools that are implementing an improvement plan submitted to the State Department of Education.

The Commission strongly supports section 3 and section 4. Prevention is the best method for reducing suspensions and expulsions. Gradually, reducing class size, especially in the state's most underserved districts that frequently have the highest rates of suspensions and expulsions will result in fewer behavioral incidents and less expulsions.

The Commission supports section 5, and emphasizes the inclusion of paragraph b because schools should utilize the Columbia Suicide Severity Scale when students are exhibiting mental health distress of suicide warning signs.

The Commission supports section 6 but recommends amending the language so that **all districts report data** to the Juvenile Justice Policy Oversight Committee, which will allow for greater accountability and additional protections for all Connecticut students.



The Commission also supports section 7, which establishes an advisory committee concerning suspensions and expulsions of students in grades preschool to two. We strongly support the establishment of this work group and would be grateful to serve in any capacity.

The effects of exclusionary discipline are associated with youth disengagement, academic turmoil, and an increased risk of entrance into the juvenile justice system. Exclusionary discipline extends beyond the students who are subject to the discipline, and, in fact, students who are witness to this type of discipline are also adversely affected.

Many of these recommendations require funding. Successful implementation of these recommendations is integral, and we recognize that successful implementation is a process that takes time and adequate funding.

H.B. No. 6759 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING EARLY CHILDHOOD

The Commission supports the H.B. 6759.

Section 1, in particular, mandates that early childhood educators receive a base pay that is more aligned with the pay of K-12 educators due to the compensation schedule developed pursuant to section 4 10-531 of the general statutes. Connecticut, as well as the entire country is in a childcare crisis. Part of this crisis is due to early childhood educators and staff leaving the field for better pay in retail and hospitality industries – as those industries have increased their pay to retain their own workforce. Compensation is the number one reason early childhood educators and staff are leaving the field.

Early childhood educators deserve equitable pay for their role in teaching children in their early stages of life. These are the most formative years for brain development. Early childhood educators are needed to support child care centers and family child care /home based care in providing these services to families that need to work, train and go to school. When we support increased compensation for early childhood educators, we support the upward mobility of families seeking to engage in the economy and continue to live and work in Connecticut.¹

H.B. No. 6760 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING CIVICS EDUCATION AND MEDIA LITERACY.

The Commission appreciates the Education Committee's commitment to increasing civics education and media literacy.

In 2022, the Commission conducted a civic deserts analysis in Hartford County. This survey received almost 600 responses and indicated a severe lack of civic engagement among the respondents.

¹ [Can childcare and Pre-K help reduce inflation?](https://www.brookings.edu/research/can-childcare-and-pre-k-help-reduce-inflation/) (brookings.edu)



After reviewing the 2022 survey data, we strongly recommend the establishment of the Connecticut Civics Education and Media Literacy Task Force, and kindly request that CWCSEO has a seat on the task force.

“Americans’ participation in civic life is essential to sustaining our democratic form of government. Without it, a government of the people, by the people and for the people will not last.”² The results in Hartford County are a microcosm of what is happening around the state and country. “Today, we see evidence of this in limited civic knowledge of the American public, 1 in 4 of whom, according to a 2016 survey are unable to name three branches of government.”³ Many reasons contribute to the decline in civic engagement, we believe that it is important for the task force to study and develop strategies to improve how public schools provide instruction on civics, citizenship, media literacy, and American government.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

We appreciate the leadership of the Education Committee.

² [The need for civic education in 21st-century schools \(brookings.edu\)](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/2016-06-20-Civic-Education-Report.pdf)

³ [The need for civic education in 21st-century schools \(brookings.edu\)](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/2016-06-20-Civic-Education-Report.pdf)